

The Tourism and Conservation Partnership

Underpaid Envelope.



Sir Michael Lyons  
Lyons Inquiry into Local Government  
Room 3/12  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London  
SW1A 2HQ

14<sup>th</sup> September 2006

Dear Sir Michael

As Chair of the Tourism and Conservation Partnership, I would like to take this opportunity to raise my objections to a 'bed tax' on tourism.

Others will have voiced their concerns about the anti-competitive nature of such a tax, its impact on businesses and its organisational difficulties. Whilst sharing these concerns, I will not repeat them but will concentrate instead on demonstrating a practical and workable alternative.

For over a decade the Tourism and Conservation Partnership has operated a very successful and entirely voluntary visitor payback scheme in the Lake District and more recently the wider county of Cumbria. The scheme works by persuading tourism operators to adopt conservation projects, and then helping them to find innovative ways of inviting their customers to fund it. For example:

Heart of the Lakes accommodation company automatically adds £2 to every invoice they raise. Guests are given the option of opting out of paying this, but rarely do. In addition, The Langdale Estate also operates a similar scheme. This funds a project that was created initially for Langdale Estate fundraising, "Our Man at the Top", two trained conservationists who work full time on footpath repair in the Langdale and Coniston areas. Guests are kept informed about where they are working and are invited to meet them and see the results of their work. Many guests make a voluntary contribution in excess of the requested £2.

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*Funding Conservation through Tourism*

Other projects have included:

- A group of hotels in Grasmere who jointly raised funds to build a footpath along the lake shore.
- A hotel in Ambleside that raised funds to replace a rickety old footbridge with a traditional stone packhorse bridge.
- A retailer in Keswick that has adopted a local mountain and carries out waymarking, bracken beating and litter picking.

I could go on. In excess of £1 million has been raised for conservation work that includes dry stone walling, habitat protection, footpath diversion, developing cycle paths, giving guests the opportunity to make their trip carbon neutral..... indeed, anything practical that will add value to the local landscape and engage with visitors.

The “opt out” (of paying) scheme described above is the most successful way of fund raising, but others may choose an “opt in” scheme (where the guest is invited to make a contribution) or may simply take a collection box. Some businesses match the funds raised by guests, and some will donate a proportion of their profits, but the scheme does not require the business to make any financial contribution, which makes it feasible for even the smallest business.

The Partnership Board includes representatives of Cumbria Tourist Board, the Lake District National Park Authority, English Nature, the National Trust and private sector operators from the hotel, self catering and transport sectors.

As already stated, in excess of £1,000,000 has been raised by over 200 tourism businesses, administered by a small team of just four people, who also administer a sustainable tourism scheme for business.

The key features of the scheme, and the reasons for its success, include:

- All visitor ‘taxation’ is entirely voluntary, a guest can decide not to make the payment (in practicality this rarely happens)
- The tourism business operating the scheme decides where the money is spent, i.e. there is full accountability.
- The Tourism and Conservation Partnership staff administrate those monies, and each benefiting conservation body honours an agreement to spend the money where the business requests.
- Visitors make the contribution because they can see the direct benefit of their donation.

Our scheme is living proof that a voluntary led approach can and does work as a method of generating funds. It is mentioned in the government’s tourism strategy, Tomorrows Tourism, and has won a number of awards, including British Airways ‘Tourism for Tomorrow’ awards in 1997, 2000 and 2002, the Business in the

Community Sieff Award (for collaboration with business) 2003 and the First Choice Responsible Tourism Award 2005.

If you would like to hear more about this initiative, or visit us to see it in practice we would be very pleased to help.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Collier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Ms Chris Collier OBE  
Chairman  
The Tourism and Conservation Partnership

#### Directors

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